

A Resolution on Our Climate Emergency

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Submitted by:

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To see if the Town will adopt the following Resolution:

WHEREAS, in April 2016, world leaders from 175 countries recognized the threat of climate change and the urgent need to combat it by signing the Paris Agreement, agreeing to keep warming, “well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels” and to “pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C”; and

WHEREAS, national security experts agree that climate emergency is a threat multiplier contributing to the Earth’s 6th mass extinction of species; and the present level of global warming has triggered catastrophic changes to the Earth’s system, including increased wildfires, heat waves, droughts, flash floods, rising seas, and extreme weather; and continued global warming would further intensify the melting of the glaciers, polar ice sheet collapse, accelerating sea level rise, superstorms, hurricanes, mosquito-borne diseases, water and food shortages, and civil unrest; and

WHEREAS, across the world, nearly 2,000 local governments in 34 countries have declared climate emergencies, including over 20 communities in Massachusetts—these emergency declarations being an urgent call to action to change our current systems, which incur devastation in our regions and contribute, in each and every community, and by each and every person, to the climate crisis; and

WHEREAS, the Town of Brookline has made significant investments in climate action over the past 20 years through robust partnerships among the public and nonprofit sectors; and

WHEREAS, the Town of Brookline can act as a leader by taking concrete steps to catalyze a regional Just Transition and urgent climate crisis mobilization for Life After Peak Oil;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Town of Brookline declare a Climate Emergency, recognizing the truth about the climate crisis and what it demands of us: an emergency response at emergency speed; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Town of Brookline create and adopt an aggressive and strategic Climate Crisis Action Plan, setting a new target for net zero carbon emissions with an aspirational goal of 2030—reduced from the existing target date of 2050—and establishing a plan for carbon neutrality in the earliest economically and technically feasible timeline; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Town of Brookline commit to keeping the outcomes of vulnerable communities integral to all Just Transition and urgent climate mobilization efforts; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Town of Brookline invest in public education and action with the mandate of acting with urgency in creating adaptations for Life After Peak Oil and the climate crisis that is upon us, with a recommended annual Climate Action Summit, bolstered by strategic working teams acting on specific targets throughout the year.

Or act on anything relative thereto.

Petitioners' Article Description

The Proposal: Climate Emergency Brookline

In Brookline's Climate Emergency Declaration (Warrant Article 37), we propose a four-pronged approach to begin urgent climate mobilization.

1. Declaring a Climate Emergency, demanding emergency response at emergency speed
2. Creating and adopting an aggressive and strategic Climate Crisis Action Plan, with a new aspirational target of achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030, establishing a plan for carbon neutrality in the earliest economically and technically feasible timeframe
3. Prioritizing vulnerable communities as central to the outcomes of climate mobilization
4. Investing in public education and action in creating adaptations for Life After Peak Oil, with recommended annual Climate Action Summits, bolstered by strategic working teams acting on specific targets throughout the year

This is only a start. We must act with urgency and intention: with a purposeful drive to make this vital shift for which our lives and the well-being of our community depends.

Scientists' Warnings on Cataclysmic Climate Crisis

In July 1992, the Union of Concerned Scientists published "World Scientists' Warning to Humanity," an open letter to the governments and people of the world cautioning of cataclysmic climate change. The paper asserted:

No more than one or a few decades remain before the chance to avert the threats we now confront will be lost and the prospects for humanity immeasurably diminished. WARNING: We the undersigned senior members of the world's scientific community hereby warn all humanity of what lies ahead. A great change in our stewardship of the earth and the life on it is required, if vast human misery is to be avoided and our global home on this planet is not to be irretrievably mutilated... This ethic must motivate a great movement, convincing reluctant leaders and reluctant governments and reluctant peoples themselves to affect the needed changes. The scientists issuing this warning hope that our message will reach and affect people everywhere. We need the help of many."

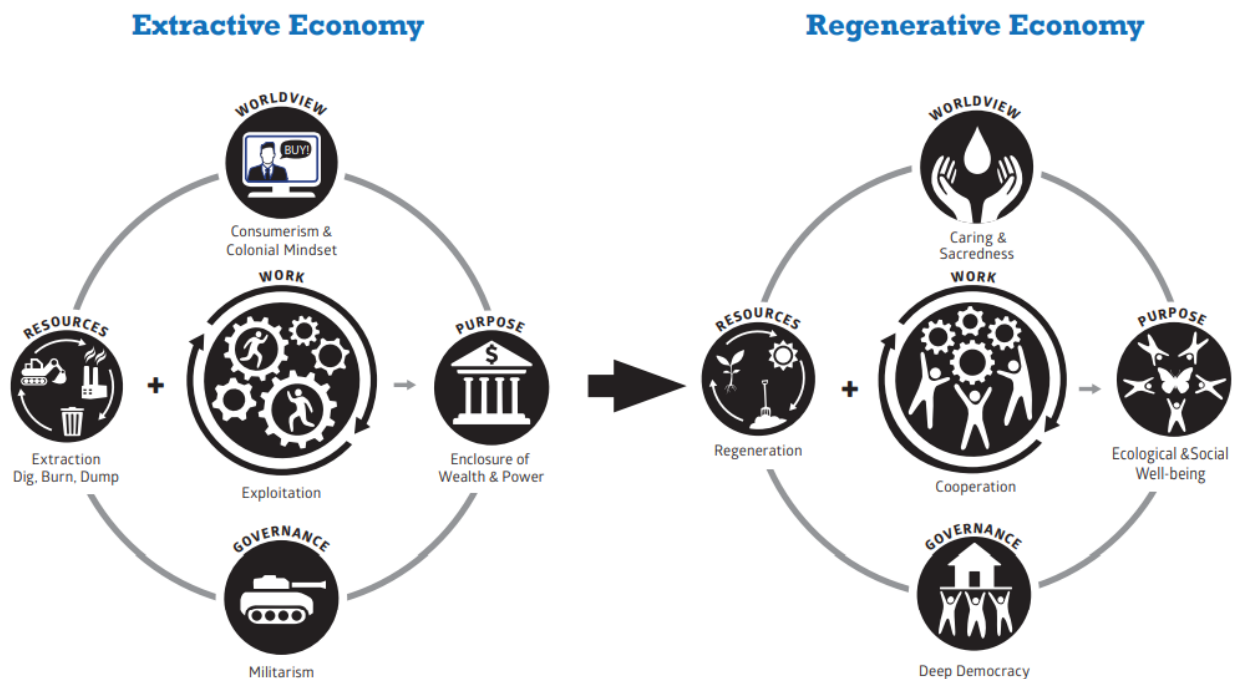
In 2019, more than 25 years after its original publication, a "Second Warning" was published, with 15,364 scientists from 184 countries signing. They stated:

Since 1992, with the exception of stabilizing the stratospheric ozone layer, humanity has failed to make sufficient progress in generally solving these foreseen environmental challenges, and alarmingly, most of them are getting far worse... Humanity is now being given a second notice... We are jeopardizing our future by not reining in our intense but geographically and demographically uneven material consumption... It is more severe than anticipated, threatening natural ecosystems and the fate of humanity... We believe that prospects will be greatest if policy makers and the rest of humanity promptly respond to our warning and declaration of climate emergency, and act to sustain life on planet Earth, our only home."

Peak Oil and the Just Transition Framework

“Peak Oil” is defined as the time when humans have reached their maximum extraction of petroleum from the earth. Scientists estimate that 2019-2040 is the last period that humanity will have access to our current levels of extraction, upon which our societies presently function.

The Just Transition framework is a developing series of guidelines being added to and refined as communities begin to shift their ways of being. Just Transition provides for a transformation that is based on equity and social justice, planning and providing for the most vulnerable members of society with the same care as those with greater resources. Its principles move communities from an extractive to a regenerative economy, from fossil fuel dependence to net zero living, with a reliance on cooperation and deep social interdependence.



(Climate Justice Alliance: Just Transition Principles)

Climate Emergency Declarations: Addressing Intersectional Justice Issues

Across the world, more than 1,900 local governments in 34 countries, including over 20 communities in Massachusetts have passed climate emergency declarations. These emergency declarations are an urgent call to action to change our current systems, which incur devastation on our regions and contribute, in each and every community and by each and every person, to the climate crisis.

While ‘natural’ disasters may appear geographically isolated, our humanity and ability to survive on earth is linked to each other. The “Second Warning” urges a societal shift to “transformative change, with social and ecological justice [that] promises greater human well-being in the long-run.”

Public engagement and an awareness of intersectional justice issues must be central to our emergency response. Indeed, in announcing the establishment of the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council, Vice President Kamala Harris stated, “We know that

we cannot achieve health justice, economic justice, racial justice, or educational justice without environmental justice.”

Each community’s climate emergency declaration reflects their priorities. In crafting Brookline’s Climate Emergency Declaration, we drew inspiration from the City of Boston’s justice-based framing. Boston’s climate emergency declaration speaks of the climate crisis as a crisis of public health that exacerbates disparities and inequalities that “disproportionately harm the most vulnerable among us—children and pregnant women, people with low income, the elderly, people with disabilities and chronic illnesses, and marginalized peoples of all races and ethnicities.”

Town of Brookline: History of Climate Action

The Town of Brookline has made significant investments in climate action over the past 20 years through robust partnerships between the public and nonprofit sectors, among them, the Town’s Department of Planning and Community Development and its Division of Economic Planning, the Select Board’s Climate Action Committee, the Advisory Committee’s Subcommittee on Sustainability, Town Meeting’s Green Caucus, and local environmental organizations, such as Brookline Greenspace Alliance, Climate Action Brookline, Climate Is Everyone’s Business, Elders Climate Action, Extinction Rebellion, 350 Massachusetts, Mothers Out Front, and Sunrise Brookline.

In 2019, the Town’s public-nonprofit partnership saw its greatest period of activity around climate action in direct alignment with the hiring of its first full-time Sustainability Program Administrator. During this period, Brookline’s first Select Board Sustainability and Climate Action Summit (“Climate Summit”) was held with hundreds of community members participating. That fall, 11 warrant articles pertaining to climate were introduced to Town Meeting—the highest concentration ever: a product of the working teams formed from the Summit.

Brookline lost its Sustainability Program Administrator in late 2019. Since then, there has been no full-time staff member devoted to climate resilience. As a result, strategic action has suffered.

Following this loss, the Town commissioned a report by the Edward J. Collins Jr. Center for Public Management of the University of Massachusetts-Boston on “Organizational Assessment of Sustainability Factors” (“Collins Report”) to study climate action and sustainability in Brookline and to recommend future directions. The Collins Report cited the following (pp. 12-21):

- “Brookline has an abundance of skilled, knowledgeable, and committed residents willing to put meaningful time and effort into furthering a sustainability agenda”
- “The Town of Brookline has a talented and skilled professional team of staff, department heads, and senior management with an understanding of the importance of sustainability issues, but the lack of clear priorities and policies hampers their effectiveness and creates frustration”
- “Multiple staff indicated that the lack of a clear strategy and strong leadership in the Town’s executive branch, or at least the communication of that strategy, creates confusion on priorities. Brookline’s staff are... hard at work to achieve objectives, but those objectives need to be clearly (and consistently) stated and laid out in an actionable framework. Several staff and department heads commented that the Climate Summit was one of the first opportunities to realize the priorities of the climate advocacy community and to get an understanding of the role both their position and those in other departments play in implementing the sustainability agenda. This should be the role of the Town’s executive leadership”

- Resulting from the Climate Summit: “Staff expressed a strong appreciation for opportunities to collaborate with residents on policy proposals... Most staff also commented on the success of the Working Teams and indicated that they were an effective way to engage staff and residents alike, explore new ideas, and facilitate compromise”
- “The stated objectives of the Select Board Climate Action Plan are not fully institutionalized in the Town organization, nor does it appear that a clear strategic pathway for implementing the broad goals of the plan have been adequately communicated... The lack of a longer timeframe for a strategic plan hinders long-term planning, as does the apparent lack of ties to individual departmental goals and objectives”

Recommending:

- “The highest priority should be assigned to the development of a strategic plan built upon the foundation of the Climate Action Plan”
- “The Working Teams should be supported and fully utilized to engage staff, department heads, senior management, resident volunteers, and experts living in the community”

Rationale and Recommendations

Warrant Article 37’s proposals for climate emergency have been crafted in close alignment with the Collins Report’s findings and recommendations.

While technically a non-binding resolution, after careful study and extensive research, the petitioners would like to make the following recommendations in addition to the primary ones made in the text of the warrant article.

We strongly believe that for urgent climate mobilization to successfully launch and be maintained year-on-year, it must be the responsibility of the Town’s executive leadership: the Select Board and the Town Administrator, and supported by Town staff in positions where climate resilience and community engagement are designated parts of their job descriptions.

Climate Crisis Action Plan

- Establishes benchmarks for key environmental indicators with time sensitive markers (e.g. one-, two-, and five-year targets), including both quantitative and qualitative assessments of factors directly affecting residents’ lives
- Builds upon the Town’s existing resources, reports, and recommendations, including its Climate Action Plans (published in 2002, 2012, 2015, 2018); the work of the former Sustainability Program Administrator (2019), the Select Board’s Sustainability and Climate Action Summit (2019) and subsequent efforts of the working teams formed from that initiative; and the Collins Report (2020)
- Creates a framework for municipal responsibility and public accountability across all Town departments, and educational institutions at every level of development, with scheduled annual demonstrations by all parties of effective work toward established benchmarks, both quantitative and qualitative; prioritizing a high degree of transparency and information sharing

Prioritizing Engagement

The petitioners underscore the need for full community participation, inclusion, and support, and recognize as stakeholders important to the mobilization effort all residents and community organizations, including but not limited to: youth, elders; racial, gender, family, and disability justice, Indigenous, immigrant, and women's rights organizations; academic, business, economic, environmental, faith-based, and scientific institutions, and other such allies.

Public Education and Action

- Hosts two climate forums yearly: one by the Town and one by environmental organizations, with the recommendation that they are balanced between Town Meetings and warrant article submission periods to enable cooperative exchanges between stakeholders (e.g. January and July)
- Reinvigorates strategic working teams to act on specific climate crisis targets, working throughout the year with the biannual forms serving as important time markers
- Works in partnership with Town staff and Town bodies, previously cited, toward discrete climate action objectives in a collaborative manner of partnership
- Prioritizes public engagement, striving for a high degree of transparency through public processes, with specific engagement and advocacy efforts encompassing the most vulnerable and marginalized populations

Citations

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- “Assistant Director of Sustainability Planning” job description, Department of Planning and Community Development, Town of Brookline (January 2021)

Respectfully submitted.